To the Senators and the Rector of the University of Cologne

Solidarity with Nancy Fraser

In 2022, the University of Cologne invited the renowned feminist philosopher Prof. Nancy Fraser to accept the Albertus Magnus Professorship at the University of Cologne in 2024. Nancy Fraser is an American philosopher, critical theorist, feminist, and Henry A. and Louise Loeb Professor of Political and Social Science and Professor of Philosophy at the New School in New York City. Widely known for her critique of identity politics and her philosophical work on the concept of justice, Fraser is also a staunch critic of contemporary liberal feminism and its abandonment of social justice issues. She was to be awarded the Cologne Visiting Professorship for her work.

On April 4, the university decided to disinvite Nancy Fraser again. The reason given by the university was the signing of the "Philosophy for Palestine" declaration, which calls for a ceasefire in the Gaza war and a rethink of policy towards the conflict between Israel and the occupied territories. In its justification for the disinvitation, the university claimed that Nancy Fraser had questioned Israel's right to exist.

A careful reading of the "Philosophy for Palestine" statement shows that this is not the case. One can take various positions on the "Philosophy for Palestine" statement. Wanting to regulate the discourse on Israel/Palestine through restrictions is in any case politically wrong and ethically unacceptable. The signatories of the text point out that the university has disgraced itself to the bone with this measure. The disinvitation is an attack on freedom of speech and academic freedom, pronounced by a university that states in its constitution:

"The University of Cologne contributes to the development of science and academic education through the cooperation of its members and the unity of research and teaching. [...] Conscious of its history, the University of Cologne realizes the freedom of science and is aware of its social responsibility. To realize this mission, it is committed to a culture of understanding and cooperation. [...] The University of Cologne develops its contribution to a sustainable, peaceful and democratic world by fulfilling its [...] tasks independently of non-academic requirements, especially in its international cooperation."

The brutal attack by Hamas on Israeli civilians on October 7 cannot be justified. However, the Israeli response is not self-defense, but an unrestrained war against non-combatants, families with children or civilians of any origin who happen to be there. The humanitarian situation in Gaza is catastrophic. There is a lack of water, food, shelter, clothing, and hygiene products. The health system has collapsed. Hunger and disease are spreading. It is already foreseeable that the starving children will suffer long-term damage. The signatories are therefore calling for an immediate ceasefire, the opening of border crossings for humanitarian aid, political negotiations and the start of a discourse that will secure peace in the region.

An end to the long-term conflict, security and peace can only be achieved with and for everyone. The university should be a place for the exchange of ideas that have social relevance. The emerging global conflicts require a discursive space in which it is possible to disagree without excluding others. We propose an open discourse on peace, humanity, and civil rights. The right to life of Israelis should no more be up for discussion than that of the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip or the West Bank. We call on the university to renew the invitation to Nancy Fraser.

You can sign the petition here *(scrawling to the bottom of the german version)*

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